

Trabuco Hills Rolls a Nat 20 on Their Production of "She Kills Monsters"
written by Pearla Seif, a sophomore at Tesoro High School

Set in 1995 Ohio, Agnes plays through her late sister Tilly's Dungeons & Dragons campaign, discovering truths about the sibling she barely knew.

Kaelynn Kirby embodies Agnes with raw authenticity, tracing her journey from dismissive older sister to devoted adventurer with careful precision. She masterfully portrays Agnes's grief, particularly during her breakdown confronting the unknowns of her sister's life. Her physicality evolves beautifully - tentative and awkward in early combat, increasingly confident as she commits to understanding Tilly.

Avery Triman brings infectious energy to Tilly, balancing fierce paladin confidence with vulnerable glimpses of the misunderstood teenager beneath. Her expressive combat makes every sword swing purposeful, while her unveiled secrets reveal fantasy as escapism from a world that refused acceptance.

Tresty Layos captivates as Chuck, the socially awkward Dungeon Master. He seamlessly transitions between narration and playing characters, maintaining relevance even while sitting in his lit corner, rolling dice as combat unfolds.

Matthew Pettay delivers surprising depth as jock boyfriend Miles, his misunderstanding of Agnes's quest providing both comedy and grounding for the fast-paced fantasy adventure. Later, he portrays Miles's gelatinous doppelganger with horrifying psychotic energy, exemplifying the shocking duality between how Tilly saw him and who he really was.

Braden Berg hilariously embodies Orcus, the retired overlord discovered lounging in a bathrobe, watching Friends on a TV he traded Tilly's soul to obtain. Constantly attempting to escape back to his sitcoms, his excellent timing makes every mid-battle departure attempt unexpectedly hilarious.

Ava DeVe and Braylen Holdredge excel as cheerleader bullies Gabbie and Tina, their synchronized movements and cruel interjections making them memorably detestable representations of the real-world cruelty that drove Tilly further into fantasy.

Rose McPherson's costume design stunningly realizes dual identities. Lilith's skimpy black leather contrasts sharply with Lily's all-denim GAP uniform, visualizing the transformation between mundane reality and empowered fantasy. Vera's realistic teenage outfit grounds the production, while the party's handmade fantasy outfits showcase impressive craftsmanship.

Rachel Stube's prop design impresses with functional, substantial weapons and the handmade quality that honors tabletop gaming's DIY spirit, all while remaining safe for dynamic stage combat.

This production of "She Kills Monsters: Young Adventurers Edition" reminds us that the games we play and stories we create reveal truths we cannot speak aloud, and sometimes the most heroic quest is simply trying to understand someone we love.